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THE
FRIENDS OF ERASMUS
WHOSE NAMES APPEAR
IN THE
LETTERS PATENT
FOUNDING OUR COLLEGE
SEPTEMBER 23, 1518



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In amicitia autem nihil fictum, nihil simulatum; et quidquid in ea est, id est verum et voluntarium.

The friendship of Erasmus for Linacre is shown in a letter written on July 26th, 1518, to Paulus Bombasius, which mentions our founder in a glowing description of the learned men who then frequented the Court of England.

“The King, the most sagacious of this age, is delighted by good books. The Queen, a wonder of her sex, is well educated, and is no less deserving of respect for piety than for learning. With them those count for most who excel in sound learning, in honesty and in wisdom. Thomas Linacre is the physician: it would be waste of time to dwell upon this man to you, since what he is, he himself demonstrates in his published books. Cuthbert Tonstall is Master of the Rolls, an office of the first dignity in England. You would scarcely believe, Paul, with this name what a vast world of all good things I can encompass. Thomas More is of the Privy Council, whose incomparable charm is due not only to the Muses and the Graces, but also to his wit, of whose genius you have been able in some degree to taste the flavour from his writings. Pace, almost a full brother to him in attainments, is Secretary. William Mountjoy is Chamberlain to the Queen. John Colet is a Royal Chaplain. I have merely enumerated the chief men.”

The ‘*Epistolæ D. Erasmi Roterodami ad diversos et aliquot aliorum ad illum*,’ printed at Basle by Froben in 1521, is in our library, and contains the letters from which I quote.

Erasmus, writing to an old pupil in Paris, shows his sympathy with the reading of our profession and his regard for Linacre. The pupil had heard of a book of the aphorisms of Erasmus, and says that he had not yet been able to see it. His teacher replies:

“Since you long for our Aphorisms, beware lest you imagine them of the same kind as those of your Hippocrates. The subject is different, but if you ask for a little book of Erasmus ‘*De institutione principis Christiani*’ by that title you will sooner find it. Farewell: Antwerp; February 25th, 1516. I hear, moreover, and rejoice that the studies of Thomas Linacre

are published in Paris. If you have not yet read More's 'Utopia,' get it, if you wish to enjoy a laugh, or, indeed, if you wish to learn from what almost all the evils of the State have arisen. Again farewell."

Another letter showing a kindly feeling towards medicine is one which Erasmus wrote for a friend who wished to send a present to his physician. The gift was a Greek 'Homer,' not improbably the beautiful first edition, printed at Florence in 1488. Our College has had the good fortune which perhaps attended the physician written to by Erasmus and possesses a copy of this noble book.

How much Erasmus admired Linacre's translations of Galen is shown in a letter to Richard Pace, chief secretary of the King, written from Louvain just a month after the foundation of this College:

"At length Galen translated by Linacre begins to appear in the book shops, a work that pleases me beyond measure"; and, he adds, "salute Linacre for me and urge him to bring out his other studies."

In a letter to Ægidius Buslidius, Erasmus says: "I send as a gift the books of Galen, the work of Thomas Linacre, now speaking better in Latin, than they erstwhile spoke in Greek."

Here and there Erasmus shows that he appreciated our founder's medical advice. After a journey to Paris in 1506 he had a severe headache, swollen glands in his neck, throbbing temples, buzzing in both ears, "Atque interim nullus adest Linacer qui me arte sua liberet." In another letter to Linacre he says: "I beg you to send me written out the remedy which when I was last in London I took on your recommendation, for the boy left the prescription at the apothecary's. It will be very pleasing to me. The rest of my news you will know from More. Farewell. From St. Omers: June 5th."

Other letters and passages show the deep and lasting friendship of these two scholars, and the affection which both had for Sir Thomas More. A letter from Erasmus to William Burbank, Wolsey's secretary, written from Louvain, September 1st, 1520, mentions two Fellows of our College. The writer asks for news of Clement, "for whom More lighted up in me sparks of affection." This was Dr. John Clement, who was elected a Fellow here in 1528 and President in 1544.

Dr. Francis, one of the six original fellows named in Henry VIII's

Letters Patent, is mentioned in the same letter as "a well-trying friend," with other learned men of Wolsey's circle. "Oh, rich that I am," says Erasmus, "oh, august and happy house. O truly magnificent cardinal, who has such men as his councillors, whose table is surrounded by such luminaries."

Besides Linacre and Francis the name of a third friend of Erasmus appears at the foot of the Letters Patent of 1518. It is that of Cuthbert Tonstall, then Master of the Rolls, afterwards Bishop, first of London and then of Durham, great as a prelate and as an ambassador and as a man of letters. "To say exactly what I feel," says Erasmus, in a letter written at Antwerp in 1518 to William Latimer, the classical scholar, "if it happened that I had Linacre or Tonstall for a teacher I should not long for Italy."

Our library contains one only of Tonstall's writings, his four books, 'De arte supputandi.' This treatise on arithmetic first appeared in London in 1522, but ours is the Paris edition of 1538, printed by Henry Estienne. It is dedicated in most friendly words to More. Tonstall explains that the money transactions of public business made him again go over arithmetic, and think upon it, and read all the writings he could find about it, whether learned or unlearned, Latin or vernacular, "for there is scarcely any nation which has not some book on the subject in its mother tongue." Then he had thought out the difficulties of the subject, and arranged and improved his explanations, following the example of a bear licking its unformed cubs into shape. "He had just," he says (this was in 1522), "been appointed to the bishoprick of London, and must give the rest of his life to sacred literature, and throw aside profane writings, and first of all these commentaries on the art of calculation." He did, however, not like to burn the result of the studies of so many nights, and so sent the book to press. The serious character, the pleasant humour, the mathematical as well as literary turn of Tonstall all come out in this dedication and in many of the examples in the book, showing how worthy he was of the friendship of More and of Linacre.

It is pleasant to discover that among the six physicians whose incorporation as the College of Physicians of London, the Master of the Rolls of 1518 witnessed, there were two who, like himself, were friends of Erasmus—Linacre, whose successor we have elected and congratulate to-day, and Dr. John Francis.

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